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A LEGEND OF ARGOLIS

And other Poems

BY
GEORGE HORTON

LONDON
T. FISHER UNWIN
PATERNOSTER SQUARE
1897

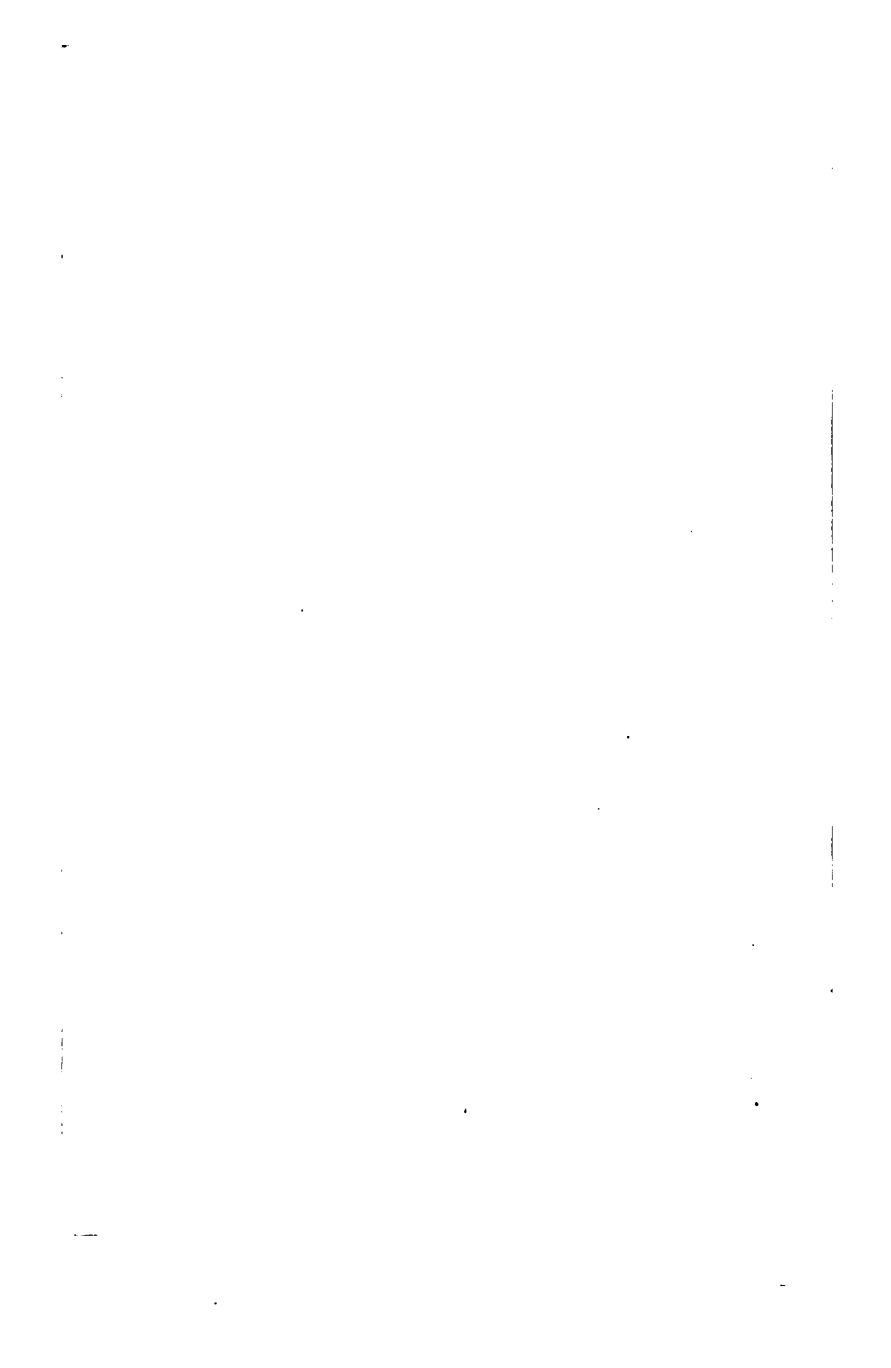
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INSCRIBED TO MY FRIEND,
ERNEST MCGAFFEY, ESQ.
OF CHICAGO.



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APHRÓESSA.

HERE on this innocent Ægean isle,
Whose mountains look on bloomy Argolis,
Will I take refuge from the world awhile—
There is no other spot so sweet as this.

Here young-eyed Spring an early haven seeks,
Fled over sea from the voluptuous south,
With pink of almond blossoms in her cheeks
And red of blood-red roses on her mouth.

With laurel leaves her brow is garlanded ;
Her breath is sea-wind mingled with the sweet,
Faint breath of flowers that, when they hear
 her tread,
Swarm out of doors to kiss her rosy feet.

Oh, that I knew the words to picture well
The almond trees when blossoming their fill !
Oh, that I wrote as sweetly as they smell,
Patches of white against the purple hill !

What brings so many swallows ere their time
O'er heaving leagues of wan and sullen seas ?
It is because they long in alien clime
All winter for the heavenly almond trees.

My heart is healed the grief it knoweth of
When I look up into the skies of Greece,
For they are deeper than divinest love
And softer than the brooding wing of peace.

Oh, happy hills of islands far away,
In purple isolation dreaming there !
Are ye creations of the truthful day,
Can any earthly country be so fair ?

The violet, unearthly air of sleep
Enfolds them in a dim poetic mist,
And slopes that nearer lie are buried deep
In tender tints of melted amethyst.

If any little town, distinctly white,
Embowered sits in silvery olive trees,
How pleasantly it lingers on the sight,
Harmonious amid softer harmonies !

What colour is so soft as olive green ?
Such tints belong not to the garish sun,
But they must be the moon's ethereal sheen
That lingers on although the night is done.

And here, if anywhere beneath the sky,
Spring decks herself as bride awaiting groom,
For long before 'tis time that she must fly
A thousand orange orchards are in bloom.

Oh, happy moment for the wanderer
Who stands at last upon the homing prow,
When first his village gleams from out the blur,
And orange orchards breathe upon his brow !

I pray you, simple people, let me bide
Here in your town and dream for many days ;
So much I loathe the world of guile and pride
That I feel worthy of your peaceful ways.

And I will be as one of you : I'll grieve
If any grieve, and sing when others sing ;
And if I may but hear it, I'll believe
In all your lore of elfin happening.

What do we know, we so-called wiser men ?
They doubt the most who most are counted
sage,
Sneering at all things : let us woo again
The fertile credence of a fresher age.

Oh, surely with becoming awe I'll tell,
And many prudent signings of the cross,
What fate a youthful shepherd once befell,
What joy he had, what long and bitter loss.

Stern manhood had not come to set its mark
Upon the lip of graceful Spiridon,
Nor had the sunny upland of his cheek
Put forth as yet a single tiny sprout
To hide the wild, red poppies of its youth.

Young Spiridon a shepherd was, and kept
His woolly flock in flowering Argolis,
And he was comely as a stripling god.
More graceful was he than a slender reed
That guards a midday lurking-place of Pan.
Brown locks he had that rippled round his
brow
Like tiny wavelets on a shining beach ;

Narcissus' features, splendid dreamy eyes,
Lips that the reddest berry could not stain
And teeth more pearly than a cuttle bone
Foam-fetched and foam-forsaken on the sands !
Oh, who can say if any little rill
Of classic blood has trickled down the years ?
Has wound its tortuous and shining way
Through ages of slow disillusionment,
Of dim despair and dark forgetfulness ?

If this can be, perhaps a tiny drop
Had mingled with the blood of Spiridon ;
For he could see the beautiful in things.
He was not blind nor deaf, as are the brutes
And brutish men ; no sordid world was his
Of commonness and dull utility.

O happy shepherd, for whom not in vain
A myriad wild-wood blossoms lifted sweet

Beseeching faces ! for whom not in vain
Fleet swallows laid above the level sea
The invisible carpet of their woven flight.
If any roguish warbler from a twig
With saucy curve of neck looked down at
 him,
Or if a petal-wingèd butterfly
Mistook some flower for its love, and with
Despairing kisses wooed it, Spiridon
Was heart-stung with a sudden dart of joy.

There is a class of men who only see
Good pasturage for cattle, tho' the mead
Is Tyrian-dyed with bright anemones ;
Who, looking at a Patmian sunset say :
" 'Twill rain to-morrow," or " It will be dry."

Young Spiridon was not of these, nor yet
Of those who count the spots upon a moth

And add the creature to a catalogue.
Untutored was he, yet as finely tuned
To harmonies of colour, sound and form
As an æolian lyre to summer winds.

He was enwrapped in Nature, and his soul
As quick to the great mother's every change
As is the unborn babe unto the heart
That feeds it ; every subtle influence
Of night and day was shadowed in his moods
As when upon a mountain, moving clouds
With sky between, cast fluent light and shade.

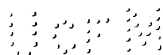
When first at dawn the awakening hills uprose
Like old leviathans, and looked about
To see if yet the shepherd sun were come,
Young Spiridon was glad—the uncertain
world
Seemed full of hope and vague resolve and
song.

How different that other twilight was
When Evening poured her horn of purple wine
Above the world, and spattered all the sky
With the unmelted jewels in the dregs !
“ O Night, thou bringest all things ! ” saith the
queen

Of song : to Spiridon she brought the stars.

He floated down a life of golden days
And lone, mysterious nights, as one who drifts
By stretches of dim forest, alternate
With peaceful open, and for comradeship
His timid flock sufficed him and the stars.

The athletic maidens of the villages,
However comely in their graceful garb,
Bewitched him not ; he never came to watch
The Pyrrhic line of girls upon the green
Dancing at Easter festivals ; nor sought



The fields in summer, where with crooked
swords

The fierce, lithe women slew the myriad
wheat.

Ah, many a twain of tropic eyes that bloomed
Twin pansy blossoms in a garden face
Leaned to his smile, and many a simple heart
Ached secretly beneath his guiltless scorn !

Who could resist the gentle Marigó—
Who but this dreamer Spiridon ? Indeed,
I know the truth of his heart history,
And what strange things befell him in the
wild.

Were it not so, I should be fain to say
That he was blind to God's most utter work.
For who that loves the lovely cannot feel
That all the beauty of the universe,
Rife as the countless laughter of the sea,

W. H. D.

Reaches flood-tide in woman ? ' Fairer she
Than wind-swept stars or song of nightingale
Or moth, moon-dusted and with dewdrop
eyes ;

Fairer is she than mountain waterfalls
Or gentle kine, knee-deep in clover fields ;
And sweeter than the sun's good-night caress
Before he puts the drowsy world to bed.
For woman's beauty makes a man forget
All other things in heaven or earth beneath
Until he hears no music save her voice,
And wots of beauty only in her face.

The sister years had made of Marigó
Their darling : one by one they went tiptoe
Across her sunny life, like nymphs that play
At hide and seek 'twixt two eternities.
Like nymphs were they, that hear the frolic
tread

Of sandalled feet, and flee into the shade ;
And as they passed, each left with Marigó
Some charm that added to her loveliness.

The opening rose a crowning moment has
When it retains the beauty of the bud,
Although the swelling glory of the flower
Has burst its bars and warmly peeps abroad.
At such exquisite age of double charm
Was Marigó : A bud of maidenhood
That half-fulfilled its riper promises.

Ah, you should see her coming from the well,
The jug upon her shoulder lifted high !
One chiselled arm with classic curve upraised,
Holding the antique amphora, her sleeve
Slipped shoulder-low from off the dimpled
 skin ;
Or look into her deep, dark eyes and say

If they indeed are black ; for Love has come
And lit his beacon in their splendid night.

A mighty walnut tree its branches spread,
Like hands in benediction, o'er the home
Of Anna, mother of our Spiridon ;
A humble cot of white, where sweet content
Had dwelt with frugal plenty many a year.
'Tis evening, and the shrill cicada's song
Has ceased among the feathery olive trees.
How suddenly the quiet fell ! but now,
A million tiny prisoners of the grove
Were rasping at the bars, when in a breath
They stopped with one accord, as if they heard
Night's footfall in the pillared corridors.

Anna stood spinning in her open door.
The forked distaff leaning from her waist
A lily seemed, that bloomed in snowy wool.

Deftly her fingers twirled the slender yarn,
While ever and anon with quavering voice
She hummed the sweet, monotonous refrain
Of some Ægean lullaby, first sung
To Grecian mothers by the crooning sea.
For Anna was awaiting Spiridon,
Her pride, her pallikar, her platane tree !
One after one the great-eyed stars awoke,
And from an orange grove the hiding moon
Came forth, dimly yet brightly beautiful.

Who can describe, what human words can
paint

Such golden ecstasy, such utter grace ?

Oh, that the song archangel, he who wrote

'Neath English skies, "See how the floor of
heaven

Is thick inlaid with patines of bright gold,"

Had been baptized in Grecian moonshine !
then
The world might read and some would under-
stand.

It is no wonder that the feathered choirs
Have picked their sweetest throat to sing at
night,
Such rare enchantment never could exist
Without a voice : and when the earth is
poured
So full of vague, yet potent ecstasy,
That even dullards cease from chattering,
They know not why—Night walks among the
trees,
And whispers to her singer, “ Sing my song ! ”

Upon a bench beneath the walnut tree
Sat Anna, waiting for her Spiridon

Until the nightingales began to spin
The fleecy moonshine into skeins of song.
But even then, though all the air was full
Of their delirium of joy and pain,
Sweeter and sadder than a seraph's love,
Her mother's heart forgot not, and she sighed :
" Why comes he not to hear his nightingales ?
Perhaps he lingers 'neath the fragrant pines,
Or gazes long upon the moongilt sea :
Sing on until he comes, O nightingales !
He loves you so, my boy, my cypress tree ! "

Out of the Grecian night came Marigó,
And seemed a part of all that perfectness
And of the hour ; she wore about her brow
A brodered kerchief tied in charming haste.
Her eyes were shining like the stars with
love,
Her tread was light as fall of orange flowers.

"I come," she said, "to share your loneliness,"
And kissed the hand that Anna held to her.
But Anna drew the fair cheek to her own,
And whispered low : "To-night he comes to
me,
And I shall tell him it is time he wed,
And that I long to see him wed with you.
Why should he say me nay ? my slightest wish
Has ever been his law, he is so good.
Besides, where will he find a fairer maid,
Or I a daughter with a kinder heart ?
He shall not put me off, for I am old
And long to see a grandchild ere I go.
I long to hold his chubby little feet,
And feel his soft, red fingers in my hair."
But Marigó, because she feared the moon
Would tell her blushes, kissed the fond old dame
And fled into the fragrant night, the while
Her heart sang louder than the nightingales.

Meanwhile our Spiridon had left his flock
Safe in the keeping of his wolfish dogs,
And homeward down the rugged mountain-
side
Was coming slow. Each treacherous step he
tried
With long slim crook, while one hand guarded
well
And lifted high above the bristling thorns
A bag of snowy curds. Full soon he came
Upon a path that led by winding ways
Into a deep ravine, where timidly
With many hidings 'mid the tumbled rock,
A little rill ran to its mother sea.
The path was dangerous here, and Spiridon
Stretched him upon a bank of velvet sand
Until the Night should bring her silver bowl
Of light, and pour it on the world. Anon
Sheer loneliness oppressed him ; e'en the dog

That loved him most and always followed
him

Lay down and slept. Somewhere among the
rocks

At sad monotonous intervals an owl
Uttered its single note ; far, far away
It seemed, yet near, as when a smitten bird
Peeps feebly while it gasps its life away.
A cricket too chirped in the wilderness
Complainingly, because he had no kin
Or comrades nearer than the firefly stars.
Even the trees that by the light of day
Are friends of man and beast, now stood apart
With cloaks of night about them tightly drawn
And whispered dread conspiracies. At last
Instinctively the shepherd's fingers sought
His pipe of reeds and drew it from his breast ;
For he was skilled to blow sweet melodies,
And many an hour that otherwise had been

Companionless, he thought away in tunes.

In such a way came music in the world—

That old god Pan, because he was uncouth
And every nymph that chanced to peep at him
Through parted grasses, frightened ran away,
Grew lonely, and for many dreary years
The whispering reeds his only comrades were.
Oh, long he listened, till at last he learned
Their secret language and he heard them boast :
“ We know all music that shall ever be,
And all that ever was in other worlds.
We have ensnared the very wildest notes
Of birds that, perched awry upon our stems,
Went mad with joy while swaying in the sun.
We know the dove's low coo, the lullaby
Of sighing winds, the lap of laughing waves.
Our hollow stems are prisons, and they hold
The fairy souls of silent melodies.”

Then old god Pan, with twinkling, curious
eyes,

And thick lips parted in astonishment,
Seized one that nearest grew and broke it off.
Long did he listen at the open end,
And shutting one eye, long he peered within.
Darkness was there and silence, nothing more.
At last, with sudden puffing of his cheeks,
He blew into the hole, in hope to drive
The lurking fairy forth ; then straightway leapt
Erect on crooked legs, for he had heard
A vibrant moan ! What wonder that the god,
Sitting thereafter at cross-legged ease,
Woody the imprisoned sprites of sound until
The shepherds' pipes grew perfect in his
hands ?

Or that the nymphs, whose rosy faces pushed
The reeds asunder, oftentimes forgot,
Alas ! too late, that old god Pan was there ?

'Twas Pan, quaint denizen of solitudes,
Who taught the lonely shepherds how to pipe,
And they from earliest ages have beguiled
The friendless hours with strange wild melodies.

So Spiridon began to play, and slow
His fingers rose and fell along the stops
Responsive to his mood ; with eyes half closed,
Sitting cross-legged on the sand, he blew
A sad refrain, monotonous and low.
While thus he sat, a playful infant star
Passed overhead leading the stately moon,
And in a magic moment Night had slipped
Her gauzy veil and flung it to the winds.

Oh, beautiful ! far up the deep ravine,
Those vague white cliffs a fairy palace are
Reached by a giant stairway, over which
Is laid the brooklet's labyrinthine thread.

The sand is silver dust, the shining pools
Are melted silver, and their bottoms gleam
With diamond stars down-fallen from the sky.
Wrapt by the birth of beauty, Spiridon
Sat gazing at the scene in ravishment,
His pipe held silently to parted lips.

What is that wild, strange singing that he hears,
Unearthly sweet ? He springs erect and looks
Above him where the cavern's rocky walls
Define a heavenly road bestrown with stars.
No human form he sees, no sprite adrift
Beneath the dazzling moon, yet overhead
A score of voices swell the weird refrain,
Haunting the night with ghostly harmony.

The singing ceases, and a sudden peal
Of elfin laughter, like a chime of bells,
Startles the sky ; far, far and faint it wanes

Ha-ha-ing down the wind. The shepherd youth
Rubs both his eyes, believing that he sleeps,
Then looks again in wide-eyed wonderment.
The laughter dies in throbbing waves, as when
One gently strikes a thin-lipped bell, and holds
It to his ear. And now 'tis gone away
As fitfully as though a door were thrown
Wide open on a room of revellers
And closed again. A few belated notes
Call to each other from far distances
And all is utter silence. Now indeed
Great fear has seized the soul of Spiridon.

Quickly he bares his head and many times
Crosses himself, while calling on the name
Of Blessed Mary, Mother of Our Lord.

While thus he stood devout, again he heard
Strange laughter, this time from a single throat.

A maiden's voice it was, so clear, so sweet,
The shepherd's music-loving heart was thrilled
With mingled joy and fear, for well he knew
No earthly voice could have such eerie charm.
Upon a jutting rock that swam high up
Full in the magic moon, he fixed his eyes,
For thence the laughter came, and while he
gazed

The fluent moonbeams flowed into a shape
And vision of ethereal loveliness.
For lo ! an instant on the perilous rock
A Nereid maiden kneeled, her radiant cheeks
Abloom with roguish mirth. Her dainty hands
Clung to the edge, and all her yellow hair
Fell downward in a flood, from which her face
Looked forth, as from a moonlit waterfall.

The impulsive shepherd flung his pipe to earth
And raised his arms in passionate appeal,

But in three heart beats she had melted back
Into thin moonshine, and the rock was bare.

Alas, for Marigó ! for nevermore
Will Spiridon so much as turn his head,
Although the softest eyes in Argolis
Yearn to him from the white, wild clematis
Wreathing her father's balcony. Ah, no !
He would not give the slightest look or thought
Although the daintiest daughters of the town
Stood by the church door on a festal day
In gala dress, more lovely than a patch
Of mingled daisies and anemones.

The shepherd reached his home before the
moon
Had stood lovelorn upon a beetling crag
And fallen with Sapphic leap into the sea.
His mother's hand he kissed, and offered her

The snowy curds with all the deference
Of one who kneels with gems before a queen.
Then sitting on the bench, his arm about
The gentle creature's waist, he talked to her
Of new-born lambs, their clumsy, foolish ways,
Of dogs that looked into his face with eyes
Brimming with thought and vainly tried to
 speak.

He told her of a sunset he had seen
When one great cloud had waved across the
 west

In shape so like a mighty angel's wing
That he had been afraid ; and how last eve
He climbed a crag to watch the Queen of Night
Open old Ocean's palace door and stroll
Into the flowery sky ; but not a word
Of fairy singing heard beneath the moon
He said, and not a word about the maid
Who smiled upon him through her yellow hair.

With harmless guile and much maternal art
His mother led the talk to Marigó ;
“ Here is a girl,” she said, “ most beautiful,
And yet without the pride that beauty brings.
Who has a whiter neck, a rounder arm ?
Who has so red a cheek, and who can dance
So featly at the village festivals ?
And yet no spider better spins than she,
No building bird is more industrious.
She’s not the girl to sit all day and eat
Muskmelon seeds upon her balcony.
Alas ! ’tis often true of women folk
That shrewdest venom flows from sweetest lips ;
But ’tis not true of Marigó. Her heart
Is full of love for everything that lives,
And sweet as St. Helene’s. More than this,
Her dowry is all ready, and mine eyes
Have seen the things—dainty embroideries,
And snowy linen sweet with lavender,

Soft woolly rugs of mingled red and white
Made by herself ; a score of long-eared goats,
Whose bleating kids shall quickly swell your
flock,

The income of a hundred olive trees—
All these she has, and better than all this,
Five hundred drachmas safely hid away."

But who that once a Nereid has seen
Can talk of marriage with a village maid ?
Oh, what cares he for fruit of olive trees,
For bleating kids, or drachmas hid away ?
"I am too young to wed," said Spiridon.
"Besides, I do not care for Marigó,
Nor such as she. She is too big and strong,
Her cheeks too red and white, and like the rugs
She makes and dyes." Such cruel heresies
Spoke he against the sweetest, kindest soul
In all the world, for he had been bewitched.

The poppies faded from the shepherd's face,
And in their stead the pale, sad lilies sprung
Of bitter yearning. Little hope he had,
But love thrives best when fed upon despair.

This only hope he clung to : once again
That he might see her face, that he might hear
Her peace-destroying voice. And so in all
The wildest, loneliest places that he knew
He cried her beauty, and declared his love
In words so mad they should have moved the
breast
Of any she that had a woman's heart.

"Oh, cruel one," he cried, "oh, cruel one,
To rob a simple shepherd of his peace !
What right had you to come into my life,
When but to look was sorrow ? What knew I
Of hair more fine than tangled moonshine,
what

Of eyes that sparkled through it like the glow
Of fireflies winking in midsummer grass ?
Oh, what knew I of arms more white than foam,
So dazzling pure, it puts the sand to shame,
Sea-washed a thousand years ? Oft have I
 dreamed

Of maidens fairer than the eye of man
Has ever seen ; have sat with one for hours
Waist deep in blooms ; or walked full loverlike
Through long, cool vistas of an ancient wood.
But never have I dreamed by night or day
Of beauty such as yours, so fatal fair."

Is there a dweller in the wilderness
Who doubts that often he is overheard
Whether he pipe or sing ? Who does not know
That all his lonely mutterings are theme
Of gossip for the unseen folk ? Bright eyes
Peep at the shepherd from thick-woven vines,

And curious faces from behind grey rocks
Steal slowly out, then dart from sight again,

And so that beauteous being must have heard
How that a comely shepherd roamed the hills

- Gone witless for a cruel Nereid's love.

Does there exist a thing in woman's shape,
Half goddess though she be, who would not
haste

To breathe the air of worship, and enjoy
The pain and ruin by her beauty made ?

Often there came to Spiridon the sense
That she he loved was near, and so because
The Nereids are a music-loving folk
He wont to sit him in the shade and pipe
His fondest strains, and as his grief increased
His piping grew in skill and tenderness,
Until at last no reed in Argolis
Could breathe such sweet despair.

A tree there was,
A mighty platane tree, that flourished near
The thicket's edge, and towered above the
copse,

Herded below in gnarled and thorny strife,
As mortals great in goodness overtop
Their pigmy kind. Oh, 'twas a noble growth !
And only lived to bring into the world
A meed of joy and peace. On summer noons,
With palms uplift, it motioned back the sun
And murmured soothingly, "Nay, not so
fierce !"

And beckoning to the weary horse it said,
"Here is a haven, come and rest with me."
Often through long and sultry afternoons,
Sleek, thoughtful cattle lingered in its shade.
And there the nodding goat would lie and
watch

Her offspring gambol, nor took heed if one

Leaped nimbly on her side and looked abroad,
Deeming the earth the radius of his eyes.

Amid the spacious foliage of this tree
Abode a world of insect tribes, whose life
Flowed on through endless generations, like
The lives of men upon a little star.
The industrious ant was there, the adventurous
bee,
The brigand spider, and the dainty moth,
And sometimes droves of flies droned drowsily,
Making a mellow music round its trunk.

One August afternoon came Spiridon
Beneath the tree, and finding that the place
Was cool and fair, he sat him down to pipe
And muse upon his love ; the slender reed
Was lifted to his lips, but ere he blew
The fickle breath escaped him in a sigh.

“ Was ever lover so forlorn,” he cried,
“ As I who live upon the memory
Of one delicious moment ? Yet her face
Is cut more vividly upon my heart :
Than goddess’ profile on an old-time gem.
Ah, happier the shepherd lad who loves
Some high-born dame, some princess sweetly
proud !

For he at least may look upon her face,
May worship from afar, as heathen men
Kneel to the moon—oh, happy, happy swain !
For he may tell his grief and bear the jeers
That are the highest praise the world can
give :

Can follow her with distant steps and say,
‘ It is not madness here to love in vain,
But simple worship.’ Ah, unhappy me !
What can I do but loiter in the shade
And sigh my sorrow to a gossip reed ? ”

While thus bemoaning fate, he stretched him
prone

And gazed into the deep green sky of leaves
That arched above his head ; their infinite stir
Fell like the blur of sleep upon his mind,
Confusing thought, and all the images
Of wakefulness were trembled out of shape,
As when a zephyr blows across the face
Of some reflecting pool. While thus he lay
The low, melodious hum of clumsy flies
Boomed its full bass among the tenor hymn
Of insects swarming in the dim, warm shade.
Thought was asleep, and so all faintest sounds
Came clear and far, familiar and yet strange.
He heard a blackbird shout in mockery
The choicest trills of half a hundred throats,
Then rise to such a heavenly height of song
It seemed Apollo after Marsyas.
A lone cicada lit upon a limb

And tuned his strident violin. A dove
Cooed in the wood, the voice of dreaming
love.

“Aphróessa ! Aphróessa !” what sound
Is that, what name wind-murmured in his ear ?
Who whispered it, what red and roguish lips
Laughed from the tangled thyme “Aphróessa” ?
The timid dove repeats “Aphróessa,”
The blackbird listening cries “Aphróessa !”

The shepherd leapt erect and called the name
In wonder mixed with fear, and when he
heard
Sweet laughter fainting as it fled, he knew
That he must sigh henceforth “Aphróessa.”

The shepherd came unto a crystal spring
That filled a rocky basin ; it was clear

As mountain air and pure as innocence.
The waters bubbled up through snowy sands
And, overflowing, made a little brook
Along whose edges lush green grasses grew,
Haunt of limp frogs and slim, smooth water-
snakes.

Ferns dipped their silken tresses in the spring
And velvet mosses crept around its brim,
Uncertain if beneath the wave or not.
Oh, every influence about the spot
Was cool and fresh, for e'en the myriad
blooms

Upon a neighbouring oleander bush
Were tinted with the pink of early dawn.
A lusty fig tree stood not far away,
Domed like a mosque, and holding 'mong its
leaves

Entangled twilight, where secreted deep
In dim recesses hung the purple figs.

Oh, spot of blest refreshment ! All day long
The lavish splash and bubble of the flood
Was heard among the hollows, making there
Delicious music for the thirsty soul.
How many creatures to this fountain came
For life and joy ! The graceful partridge cock
At early dawn stepped softly from the wood
And whistled to his flock if all was safe.
Often the song-bird, panting in the shade,
Flew down to bathe and flutter in the pool,
And when the day was hottest, yellow wasps
Stood tiptoe on the brink and buzzing drank.

So Spiridon a moment ere he knelt
To quaff the limpid freshness, paused to list
The voice of running waters, while his eyes
Outran delay and quickly drank their full.

What says " Aphróessa, Aphróessa " ?
Not loudly, as a mocking-bird might call

A word so fair 'tis music in itself,
But whisperingly, as a zephyr lisps
Among the nodding tree-tops. Yet no breeze
Was stirring in the pines ; the spindles hung
Untrembling in the balsam-laden air.

“ ‘Aphróessa ! Aphróessa’ ! so oft
I’ve breathed the name that every lovely sound
In nature seems an echo of my thought.
My heart beats out its syllables ; and yet
I hear ‘Aphróessa, Aphróessa’ ? ”

So mused the shepherd, much perplexed, until
He spied a spot below him where the brook
Fell thinly o’er a ledge of rocks and bloomed
In drifts of creamy foam, pink shot with sun.
Thither he ran to listen, but he heard
Naught save the silken hissing of the stream.

“Aphróessa ! Aphróessa” ! and now
The overflowing waters of the spring
Bubble the word as children talk in tears ;
But when he turns to look, oh, mockery !
The rhythmic wavelets of a shallow pool
Take up the sound and laugh it on the sands.

He sees the pallid moon, disconsolate,
For night has led the stars away and left
Her there, forgotten in an alien sky :
He sees this only, and the rocks and trees
And the glad waters flinging back the sun.

In sheer despair he kneels beside the pool
To bathe his throbbing brow—what lovely face
Looks from the wave in roguish innocence,
Now vague amid the fluent lymph, now clear
As mirrored beauty smiling at itself ?
'Twas she, Aphróessa, as whitely fair

As though a water-lily stood tiptoe
But could not lift its petals to the air.
Her parted lips were redder than the bright
Anemone that blooms beneath the sea—
How soft they tremble on her coral teeth !
Her eyes made dim the clearness of the pool,
And all about her in the crystal flood
Her yellow tresses floated pale and fine.

“At last !” cried Spiridon—“oh, love, at last !”
And falling on his face he thrust his arms
Deep in the pool. How shall I tell his grief,
How shall I tell his tortures as he lay
Panting with passion ? For the twentieth
time

The sweet face trembled back to perfectness,
But if he touched the fluid mirror, if
He breathed upon it with kiss-shapen lips,
The features mocked him with large grimaces.

And once he wooed the shape with honeyed
prayers

Most piteously sweet, and then it smiled
So tenderly upon him that he threw
His arms about the yellow floating hair—
Alas ! alas ! 'twas cold elusiveness.

At earliest morning Spiridon had gone
Into an ancient forest ; 'twas a place
Of dim solemnity, whose mossy trunks
Made quiet corridors, that seemed more sad
Than some old cloister long untenanted.
'Twas spacious as a Jovian portico
Or antique stoa suitable for thought,
Whose giant shafts, beleaguered by the years,
Make their last stand among their fallen kin.

Oh, very sad was Spiridon ! His eyes
Were fixed upon the earth, and when he
sighed

'Twas tremulously, as a punished child
Breathes in its sleep. Unto such wretched
state

Love brings a man. Sometimes in feverish
spleen

He paused and cursed his fate and with his
staff

Beat on the guiltless ground. "Fool ! fool !"
he cried,

"Cowardly fool, who might have drowned
myself

While yet her image lingered in the wave,
And so have died seeing her last of all."

While thus he mused, much wondering he
heard

The golden strumming of a lyre, as sweet
As though the boom of bees, when first they
rise

In flight, were set to music. Straight and fair
Before him stretched a sylvan avenue
Under whose leafy portal peeped the day,
And thither hied the shepherd, for the sounds
Grew louder as he went. Tiptoe he walked
And scarcely breathed, for ever in his heart
Was that one hope to see Aphróessa.

Behind a chieftain rock about whose form
Attending vines had thrown a verdant robe
Inwove with snowy blooms, stood Spiridon.
Pushing the leaves aside, full cautiously
He looked upon a meadow, brightly green,
Where countless yellow dandelions grew
And white wild carrots lifted high their stems,
As though a prince of India lolled along
With pomp of sunward-tilted parasols.
And all amid the fluffy, golden flowers
Zigzagged the robber bees, or swaggered there
Among the pollen with thick-booted thighs.

A chosen spot there was of velvet sward
Close-cropped and shaded by a mighty rock.
And there upon a little mound of earth
Sat one who lyred, akimbo at the strings,
In pose more graceful than a poet's dream
Of Lesbian Sappho with her cithara.
Voluptuous music was her every move,
And as she tapped the earth with sandalled toe,
Or swayed her sweet form to the melody,
Her slightest attitude was so instinct
With gracefulness, she seemed bewitched with
rhythm.

Three Nereid maids meanwhile expressed the
air
In stately dance, sweet music's pantomime.
It was an ancient Lydian harmony,
Monotonous and slow, as when the lyre
Had fewer strings and only those of love.

But now indeed I pause in deep despair,
Knowing full well that I shall never mix
Words that would paint the picture of those
 nymphs.

Yes, even he who told a Grecian urn
In song more dainty than the thing itself
Would meet with failure here, nor could the
 brush

Of defftest painter catch the easy sway
Of supple bodies, or the varied charm
Of changing poses when each moment brings
Its own fair picture ; hand in hand they
 danced—

Bending far back like lilies in the wind—
Or nodding all their heads together while
They tripped it in a ring ; sometimes aline
They started o'er the green, with lifted leg
And foot poised ready for the tiptoe step.
And ever as they moved, their drapery

Clung to their forms or floated on the breeze

In undulations of Pæonion grace.

White clad were they, except their pink-white
arms,

And these were bare; upon their heads they wore

Crowns of the starry jasmine, honey sweet.

Their hair was yellow as ripe wheat and fine

As the silk thread wherein the mummy worm

Dreams of his heaven and wakes to find it
true :

E'en to the feet it fell, a priceless robe,

Like that which Lady Godiva enwrapped

About her modest nudaity ; in their hands,

With many wavy floatings on the wind

And many playful flutterings, they held

Their magic veils, those wondrous strips of
gauze

That give invisibility, and power

To swim like thistledown upon the air,

And youth that drifts along the centuries
Unwithered as a rosebud in a brook

What shepherd has not heard a hundred times
From wise old women, and from other springs
Of certain knowledge, how the Nereid's power
Lies in her magic veil ? Snatch that away
And she will follow like a little child—
The slave of him who holds it. Who shall tell
The joy and torture of our Spiridon
Hid there among the vines ? Aphróessa
Was dancing with the dancers. He could see
Her body gleaming through the gauzy robe
And hear the whisper of her drapery
Upon her smooth round limbs. Oh, heartless
Love,
Who tortures us with such a cruel flame
And lets us look on heaven ! that heathen
dream

Of one who bent with parched and swollen
tongue
O'er cooling waters that eluded him,
Is love's own parable.

Now Spiridon
Stood trembling in the vines, one moment hot
One moment cold, for love's malaria
Had crept into his marrow ; all his soul
And all his life were centred in the thought
To snatch the Nereid's veil. He was more
tense
Than the sleek cat that crouches patiently
Beneath the fluttering bird ; at last ! at last !
Aphróessa came near, and as she danced
The filmy fabric floated by his face—

Out darted Spiridon and leapt at it,
When lo ! the maidens vanished from his gaze

As utterly as people of a dream
From eyes that open on reality.

One instant stands the shepherd so perplexed
He does not hear sweet laughter mocking him,
Or if he hears, it is as when the door
Of sleep is left ajar, and waking sounds
Flit in like day-birds into candle light.
But when his own name floated merrily
Adown the rippling syllables of mirth
He looked, and there upon the forest's edge
Stood fair Aphróessa ; to Spiridon
She stretched inviting arms and from her eyes
There leapt a laughing challenge ; in one hand
She held the magic veil ; her snowy robe
Was bound beneath her bosom with a zone
Of golden scales ; no modern woman she
Attired in stiff, unchanging ugliness.
The supple form was free, one breast was bare,

A snowy hill upon whose summit love
Had set a beacon pyre ; 'twas virgin firm
And yet voluptuous, as when some girl
Diana slender hints at motherhood.

The fluent drapery falling from her belt
Whether it clung or floated free, obeyed
The Grecian fingers of the officious wind.
Her feet were nude, except that o'er them
crossed

A sandal's fastenings ; not large were they
Nor small, for either is deformity.
The lovely toes, like white mice all asleep,
Lay side by side. Oh, happy Spiridon,
Whose eyes at least might kiss his lady's feet !
Her chest was deep as Hera's, and the neck
Arose from sloping shoulders round and fair
As an uplifted column ; suddenly
She twined her hair about a glowing arm

And with the white hand held it to her breast ;
Turning as though to flee into the wood
She cast a backward glance the while she sang :

“ Who would catch a Nereid maid
He must follow, follow
Fleetly on through sunny glade
And through sylvan hollow.
Come away at early morn
If you love me, mortal,
While the knight bee winds his horn
At the rose's portal.”

The ardent youth sprang forward, and the
nymph
Flitted before him through the leafy wood.
So doth a child pursue a butterfly
Among the roses on a summer's morn.
The gaudy creature slightly moves its wings
And swims the wind with fleet, ærial grace ;

The eager boy flies after, unawares
Of weariness or hunger, while his cheeks
So redly glow, the insect often turns
To see if it shall light on them or not.
With chubby arms outstretched, with parted
 lips
And fascinated eyes, the child pursues
The prize that now is at his finger-tips,
Now floating far away ; and if it rests
One moment on the bosom of a rose
It flits before his fingers close on it.

So Spiridon through all that summer morn
Followed Aphróessa among the trees.
Sometimes her drapery seemed to brush his
 face,
But he could no more catch it than a cloud.
Sometimes she sat upon a fallen tree
And mocked at him, beseeching him to come

And take her in his arms, but when he would,
She bounded from him with a playful scream
And burst of sunny laughter ; once she stood
Tiptoe behind a bush, and peeping o'er
Besought him : " Gentle shepherd, stand you
still

Behind this leafy wall and woo awhile.
What ! would you chase a woman like a sheep
And hook her with your staff ? Call me sweet
names,

Tell me how fair I am. No woman lives
Who will not yield to him who pleads aright."

" Ah ! " cried the panting shepherd, " now you
set

A task too hard for me ; I'll follow you
While I've a single heart-beat left, or strength
To lift a limb. Oh, I can die for you
But cannot tell how fair you are, our speech

Was never made with thought of loveliness
Like yours, there are not words to cope with
it."

At this she clapped her little hands and cried :
"This want of language is more eloquent
Than any richness. I am almost won.
Yet would I hear the sweetest things you
know.

I have a woman's ear, that takes delight
In honeyed names and flattering metaphor."

At this her head she tilted like a bird
That hears a new note in the wilderness,
In pretty pose of curiosity.
"If you'll but stand and let me feast my eyes
Upon your goddess face," cried Spiridon,
"I'll pour you out a tireless stream of talk,
Whose every wave shall be a simile

Praising your loveliness. You are more sweet,
Yea, more delicious than cold water is
Found suddenly by one who raves for drink
In desert sands. So do I long for you,
So do I look and thirst but cannot drink.
Your voice is like the sound of such a stream."

"Nay, turn me not to water," laughed the
nymph ;

"Am I so cold and do I babble so ?"

"There's not a berry in the wood whose blood
Could stain your lips. If but the wild, red
rose

Could steal the fragrance of the jasmine bloom
I'd shut my eyes and kiss it for your mouth.
Your lips are bright as a pomegranate bloom
When all the tree save that one little flower
Is overshadowed by woodland clematis."

"Nay, leave my lips, good shepherd, 'tis not
meet
To dwell so long upon a maiden's lips !"

"Your neck is whiter than fresh milk, your
skin
More soft and delicate than new-made curds."

"Fie, saucy shepherd ! is it thus you woo ?
Am I as cold as water, sour as curds ?"
"Mock on, Aphróessa, mock all you will !
Laugh me into the meanest thing alive
So you'll but stay and let me hear your voice."

"Tell me about my cheeks. Of course you'll
say
They're like a peach ?"

"Why, if an autumn peach,
Of softest skin and downy bloom most rare,

Were tinted with bright blood that came and
went

Beneath transparent whiteness, then I'd say
Your cheeks were like a peach. They are in truth
Like all the fairest peaches on a tree
Where all are beautiful. If one is pale,
It is Aphróessa, perchance in thought ;
Its neighbour here has but a crimson spot
Among its dainty pallor : 'tis my love
When she is angry with poor Spiridon.
Another is all red, and so you looked
When dancing on the dandelions there.
Here's one beneath whose downy surface
spreads

A faint but general bloom : it is my love
When she's asleep. I see her glossy cheek
Nesting upon her arm——"

" Oh, fare thee well ! "

Exclaimed Aphróessa. " I'm put to bed,

So it's high time I said 'good-night' to you."
With that she danced away, and in a breath
Was flitting whitely 'mong the solemn trees.
Where a long vista narrowed to its end,
A shaft of sunshine pierced the sombre shade
And glorified her while she paused to sing :

“Never mind the midday sun,
White in summer weather,
For you follow after one
Airy as a feather.

All the yellow afternoon
You must falter never :
Should the weary shepherd swoon,
I am gone for ever !”

Love winged the shepherd's feet and bore him
up ;
He noted not the passing hours, nor thirst,

Nor heat, nor weariness, but ran and ran
Over the silent floor of fallen leaves
In vain pursuit of the fair, cruel sprite.
Once lightly up a rocky steep she led,
And bending o'er him warbled from a ledge :

“ Up the steepest mountain height
You must struggle after ;
Where I go in easy flight,
Where you hear my laughter.”

At eventide stood fair Aphróessa
Upon the western borders of the wood.
The regal sun forgot his fierce regard
And gave the world a mellow parting smile
Before he left it with the satrap stars ;
An old gold light lay on the sea, and shot
Its level lances o'er the meadow-land.
Into the wood the furtive splendour crept,

Searching its inner nooks. The tall, bare
trunks

Were touched with glory toward the dying day.

“Farewell, good shepherd !” said Aphróessa :

“The night is near, and I must hie me home

Unto my people. But before I go,

I thank you for a pleasant summer day.

You run right well, and from your honeyed
tongue

Drips most persuasive flattery. 'Tis rue

To waste such talents on a Nereid maid.

Leave the chase, unhappy lad !

Or if you must marry,

Make a village maiden glad—

Though she run she'll tarry.”

Then dropping both her silken-fringed lids

Over the eyes that would not feign at grief,

She sighed most dolefully ; while her red lips

Into a rosebud that is half a rose
She drew, and from her gathered finger-tips
Wafted a kiss. Oh, joyless mockery !
“ Farewell,” she sighed, “ good shepherd, fare
you well ! ”

And turning with a proud and queenly sweep
Of gathered robes, and with a stately bow
Like some great lady in a minuet,
She fled, when lo !

A zephyr caught her veil
And twisted it about a thorny branch.
Now ! shepherd, now ! if you would taste
delights
Worthy the young old gods ! One heart-beat
more

And all is lost. See in what frantic haste
Aphróessa is struggling for the veil.
But Spiridon is there, his weary limbs
Electrified with sudden hope ! He leaps,

He breaks the limb away, and tears
The gauzy thing from out the Nereid's grasp.
She springs upon him like a lioness. In vain !
He throws his right arm round the glowing
form

And holds the veil behind his back. At last
The struggles cease, the yielding body lies
Soft on his breast as though in willingness.
He feels the strong heart beat beneath his
hand,

The cool, smooth hair upon his cheek. He
hides

His face among it and breathes deep, as one
Would smell a flower. What flower was e'er
so sweet ?

Our Spiridon grows faint, but will not swoon.
He must not die of joy—not yet ! not yet !
He lifts her face and looks into her eyes

As one would lift a flower with broken stem.
She smiles a wan, sad smile : "Give me my
veil !

What ! Will the comeliest youth in Argolis,
The strongest and the very wisest too,
Descend to force a helpless maiden's love ?
Give me my veil and woo me as you should."

But Spiridon replied : " You should not have
Your veil by pleading here a thousand years.
No, though you blamed me with such elo-
quence

As made the very stones cry 'shame' on me
Would I not yield. Nor will I heed your tears
Quenching with ruffian brine the sweetest eyes
That ever broke a heart. I pity more
The wretch I would be if I had you not !"

He took her by the hand, and through the
wood

He led her like a disobedient child,
Brought to its mother to confess a fault.
Backward she hung, reluctantly, with head
Drooping to hide her face ; her lily neck
Blushed rosy with the dawn of maiden shame.

“ Fear not,” said Spiridon, “ my love, my life,
My heart’s delight, my joy, my little bird !
I know a cavern by a crystal brook ;
Tall oleanders grow before the door,
And all about beneath the pleasant trees
Are flowery couches, whereon we may sit
And talk of love, and when we tire of these,
I’ll spread soft fleeces on the cavern floor.
Oh, we will wander ’neath the summer moon,
My arm about your waist, pausing full oft
To hear the impatient nightingales express
Those raptures that we feel but cannot say.
I’ll bring the fairest blossoms of the year,

And weave them into garlands for your brow.
Wild roses red as blood, pomegranate flowers,
Sprigs of the scented basil, osier blooms,
And morning glories purple, pink and white.
And I know, too, a hundred little blooms
That hide among the grasses ; tiny things,
So small that we must bend to look for them,
And yet most perfect ; dainty bells that swing
Tolling out perfume ; heaven-gazing stars
That do not catch the wild bee's eye, yet each
As wonderful and perfect as a sun.

And I will make you every day a wand
Of jasmine buds that, threaded on a twig,
Will open when you kiss them, and breathe
back

Your very breath ; and I will bring you too
The prettiest little lambs in all the flock
To love you, Dear, and be your followers.

Nor shall you lack for dainties, for I'll choose
The whitest curds for you, and fill a gourd
Each morn with sweetest milk ; besides, who
knows

So well as I where juiciest berries grow,
Delicious figs, and golden mousmoula ?”

She seemed to heed him, in a breath she
dropped

Her mood of angry sorrow and became
As shyly happy as a half-hour bride
When love is maddest. Thus she hid her eyes
The while her body shivered at his touch,
Or flashed brief glances through him, looks
that spoke

Of shame and joy commingled—joy so great
No shame could hide it—shame that fiercer
grew

Even with the bliss it blushed for. So they
came

At purple evening to the port of love,
And all night long upon a flowery couch
The shepherd drank the strong, delirious wine
That youth and love mix only once for man ;
The Nereid plied him with the cup of bliss
Until he lost all knowledge save the thought
That he was drunk with joy. She held him
close,
So flooding him with tingling ecstasy
That he believed her kisses, and at last
She cozened him to give her back the veil.

She took him like a mother to her breast,
Her balmy breast, whose rhythmic rise and
fall
Lulled him as softly as a summer wave.
With her cool hair she soothed his burning
eyes,
Piling the fragrant tresses on his face

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And on her own. She whispered lip to lip :
“ See how I love you, darling, for I stay
E'en though I have the veil. For your dear
sake

Will I give up my thousand years of life
And we'll grow old together. Now I know
That perfect joy must wither like a flower ;
But while it lasts, how sweet ! how sweet it is !
Now close your eyes, my love, and sleep, and
sleep.”

Her poppy kisses lay upon his lids ;
Her fragrant sighs were like a breeze that blows
From indolent islands of the southern seas
Where life is but a dream of love. He slept.

Then did the fair, false creature lay his head
Upon the earth, and, springing from the couch,
Vanished for ever from the eyes of men.



Here ends the simple tale of Spiridon.
The madness of an hour had blighted him,
Changing his life to worse than weariness.
They found him dead beside the magic spring.
His crook lay near, but never more would he
Run to the rescue of the wayward lambs.
They buried him among the rustic dead,
And many village maidens wept for him ;
And one, fairest of all the countryside,
Grieved with a lifelong sorrow. Even now,
After long years, her withered, trembling
 hands
Hang frequent wreaths upon the unsightly
 cross
Of wood that marks the shepherd's grave. Ah,
 me !
Love blooming in an aged woman's heart
Is very sad and beautiful, as when
One lone rose lingers where a garden was.

Old Father Zeus is dead, long, long ago ;
He drank sweet nectar from a golden bowl,
And lived high up above the cares of men.
He breathed sweet incense from a thousand
fres,
And smiled benignly while immortal bards
Assuaged his soul with most harmonious
praise.

But he is gone, and with him all the gods
That wont to loll upon Olympian clouds.

Ah, me ! sweet Cytherea is no more,
The fairest dream of men who dreamt most
fair.

She was the poet's woman—passionate
As some young girl whose pulses are athrill
With most delicious torture, strange to her,

Until she look upon the chosen swain.
And she was beautiful beyond the power
Of God or man to look and live in peace ;
Most delicate and yet voluptuous,
Divinely and yet softly beautiful.
Her every undulate move was a caress,
And never from her lips a moment strayed
The roguishness and tenderness of love.
Her breath was perfume, and her rosy skin
Soft as the bosom of first motherhood.

And Artemis is gone for evermore,
Who followed with fleet foot the flying stag
Far into deeps of forests old and dim.
She was more graceful than the fairest boy
Ever idealised upon an urn,
And, save for dimpled knees and budding
 breasts
And wealth of hair that often in the chase

Slipped from its coil and clothed her to the
thighs,

She might have looked another Ganymede,
Or him who died of innocent despair

Because no maid was lovelier than he.

She was all woman too, and when the moon
Poured its full splendour through the Latmian
wood

She fled the chase for many and many a night
To mourn beside her lost Endymion.

Oh, blissful moment when he oped his eyes
To see the lovelorn goddess floating down,
Her robes of woven moonlight drifting close
About the beauty of her radiant form !

And Psyche too is gone, who wandered far
Seeking for tidings of her vanished love.

Sometimes a shepherd leaning on his staff
Was startled by a plaintive voice that called,

"I prithee, shepherd, hast thou seen my love?"

And there a girlish figure clad in white

Stood lily-wise among the anemones.

And as he looked in mute astonishment¹

He heard again the pleading voice that said,

"Oh, tell me, shepherd, did he pass this way?"

Sometimes she saw a swain who played the
pipe,

And hailed him till he paused with gathered
lips :

"Oh, tell me, piper, have you seen my love?"

Oh, many days she went her lonely way

Seeking for tidings of the vanished one,

And oftentimes some kindly soul would ask :

"How looked your love? What sort of man
was he?"

Then would her full heart overflow its bounds

And flood the ear with sudden eloquence :

“ Oh, he was fairer than a wild, white rose
That flushes faintly with a hue of pink,
And baby soft was all his naked flesh.
Thick curls about his waxen temples grew—
Light brown were they and fine as spiders' silk.
His lips were redder than a poppy leaf
That blazes in a bed of snowy thyme,
And when he sighed his breath was like
perfume
Wind-wafted from the climbing clematis,
And sweeter were his kisses than the scent
Down sifting from a heaven of jasmine stars.”

What happy beings were the ancient gods !
How beautiful they were, how lifted up
Above the mean and sordid thoughts of men,
And free from every pain save those of love !
Their memories are as sad and beautiful
As columns of old temples that uprear

Their graceful heads o'er heaps of ruined walls—
And so they gleam amid the ruined past.

What man is there who loves the beautiful
Who has not grieved for stately Artemis—
For Aphrodite and her rosy son,
For bright Apollo and sweet Ganymede ?

Their temples are destroyed, their images
Long since have been despoiled by impious
 hands,
And they themselves have waned like proud,
 fair stars
Before the fierce sun of a later creed.

But not alone the skies of Greece were
 thronged
With deities, for river, grove, and fount
Were peopled with a vague, ethereal folk ;

And some of these, because they were not
great,

But lived deep hid in forests hoar and still,
Whose giant trunks eternal twilight made,
Have never been molested in their haunts.

Often the simple shepherd of to-day,
Bending to drink from out a crystal pool,
Beholds a sweet face trembling in the lymph ;
Sometimes he hears wild singing in the wood,
And if the voice be more than mortal sweet
He signs the cross and mutters hasty prayers.
They even know, the pious village folk,
Of fairy routs that play on ancient pipes
And dance, white-clad, beneath the summer
moon.

Strange tales the watchers of the vineyards tell,
Huddled at noon within their leafy huts ;

Ah, then no merry laugh is heard, no song
From hearts however full of joy or love,
For woodland spirits lie asleep at noon,
And rise in wrath if any sound they hear.
Strange tales the shepherds tell around the fires
That gleam at night upon the lonely hills.

Oh, for a touch of that poetic charm
That sifts into the hearts of uncouth men,
Who lodge apart beneath the large white stars
And listen to the whispering wilderness !

PAN.

THAT old god Pan,
By some sweet stream that ran
Through dreamy fields Arcadian,

Safe hid would lie
'Mongst reeds and rushes high,
And watch the flashing waves go by.

Often he made
Soft music in the shade,
And all things listened while he played.

He earliest knew
What sound-souls fair and true
In whispering reeds imprisoned grew.

'Twas he that in
Their hollow pipes and thin
Found all of Nature's dulcet din.

He played ; the thrush,
Hid in leaf-bower lush,
With head awry grew mute and hush,

And honey-bees,
Quiring in blossomed trees,
Would cease to list his melodies.

His pipe to hear,
The timid fawn stole near
And, quite entranced, forgot its fear.

And many a face
Of nymph and woodland grace
Peeped through into his hiding-place.

We of to-day
On scrannel pipes that play,
Make discord, blow them how we may.

Oh, that some man
By stream Arcadian
Might find the syrinx of old Pan !

CUPID SLEEPING.

(FROM THE ANTHOLOGY.)

THROUGH a shady forest going,
Found we Cupid all alone,
And his cheeks, so smoothly glowing,
Like to golden apples shone.

He had not his quiver by him,
Nor his bow, well bent and strung ;
But we soon espied them nigh him,
'Midst the leafy branches hung.

Chains of sleep his limbs encumbered,
As among the flowers he lay,
Smiling even while he slumbered,
In his cruel, roguish way.

Swarms of tawny bees came flying
All about his waxen lip—
Often thus one sees them trying
Flowers, that with honey drip.

THE HONEY THIEF.

(FROM THE ANTHOLOGY.)

LOVE, the thief, chanced on a day

Near the bees to linger,

When a naughty one, they say,

Stung him on the finger.

Oh, the wound it hurt him so !

How he blew and shook it !

How he stamped and danced with woe,

Then to mother took it !

Spreading all his fingers, he

Sobbed to Aphrodite :

"Mother, little is the bee,

But its sting is mighty !"

Then the Queen of Passion smiled,
And she answered merely :
"You are small yourself, my child,
But you wound severely."

BALLADE OF SAPPHO'S FAME.

(TO MADAME BAKHMÉTEFF, ATHENS.)

OH, who was lord of Lesbos' isle
When Sappho sang for many a year,
And great Apollo's self the while,
Ceased from the lyre and bent to hear ?
The titles to his heart so near,
His lineage, who can now repeat ?
Yet she escaped oblivion drear
Who said that love is "bitter-sweet."

And who by wealth or selfish guile
Became the island's proudest peer ?
What siren with voluptuous wile
Was potent at the royal ear ?

Who gained renown with sword and spear ?
Their fame is dust beneath the feet
Of Time, and she alone is dear
Who said that love is "bitter-sweet."

Our joy is sadder than the smile
Of grief that cannot shed a tear ;
Our lives are like a little mile
Marked on the orbit of a sphere ;
The wisdom that we most revere
Is mixed with folly and defeat :
Her laurel never can grow sere
Who said that love is "bitter-sweet."

ENVOI.

From out that pallid atmosphere
Where dawn and darkness vaguely meet,
Comes but her lark-note cool and clear
Who said that love is "bitter-sweet."

A NIGHT IN LESBOS.

Δέδυκε μὲν ἃ σελάνα
Καὶ Πληιάδες, μέσαι δέ
νύκτες, πάρα δ' ἔρχεται ὥρα,
ἔγω δὲ μόνα κατεύδω.

SAPPHO.

THE moon has left the sky,
The Pleiades are flown,
Midnight is creeping nigh,
And I am still alone.

Ah me ! how long, how long
Are all these weary hours !
I hate the night-bird's song
Among the Lesbian flowers.

I hate the soft, sweet breeze
That comes to kiss my hair
From oleander trees
And waters cool and fair.

My heart is fierce and wild ;
The winds should rave and moan.
Ah ! why is Nature mild
When I am here alone ?

While yet the silver moon
Rode o'er the laughing sea,
My heart was glad, for, " Soon,"
I said, " He comes to me."

But when its placid sphere
Slid swiftly 'neath the wave,
I sighed, " He is not here.
Be brave, my heart, be brave !"